‘an actual present alive with multiple futures’: Narrative, Memory and Time in Ben Lerner’s *10:04*

Leonid Bilmes

School of English and Drama, Queen Mary University of London, UK

Contact: leonid.bilmes@gmail.com

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‘an actual present alive with multiple futures’: Narrative, Memory and Time in Ben Lerner’s *10:04*

This essay reads Ben Lerner’s second novel, *10:04*, alongside contemporary accounts of narrative time and digital memory technologies, and argues that this narrative reflects on a shift in temporality, whereby present experience is increasingly relegated to future recollection. Bernard Stiegler provides a useful analysis of this situation, as his philosophical account of technics foregrounds memory’s reliance on technology, whereby the present is increasingly archived as a future memory. Stiegler also insists that every tool carries within itself a capacity for re-invention and projection into different futures, and this essay reads narrative form in this sense of an inventive technics capable of projecting us not into actual futures, but into a sense of future possibility. Lerner’s narrator may be read as seeking to open up the future by revisiting possibilities which his past self once imagined, and also by imagining future moments of retrospect from which he will one day have recounted his experience. It is in the mode of the anticipation of retrospection that a sense of the future is kept open in this novel, despite the temporally foreclosed structure of an already written narrative.

Keywords: narrative; memory; time; future; prolepsis; Ben Lerner; Bernard Stiegler; Mark Currie

[Each] of us is constantly striving to reorganize mere chronology into some meaningful pattern, to narrate our pasts in a way that makes a future thinkable.[1]

[The] world of the future is already falling in an avalanche on the memory of the past.[2]

The tool is already a projection screen, since the adoption of such a past is – immediately – adopting the capacity to project a future.[3]

In *10:04* (2014), Ben Lerner's fictional avatar, Ben,[4] has been invited to give a speech before an august audience of academics and writers at Columbia School of the Arts. This speech is interesting for two reasons: firstly, it foregrounds the importance of memory and its relation to futurity in this novel; and secondly, it reflects on the impact of mass media on personal memory. As often happens with memories of mass mediated events, Ben's recollection is here of a national tragedy:

> In the story I've been telling myself lately, I became a poet, or became interested in becoming a poet, on January twenty-eighth, 1986, at the age of seven. Like most Americans who were alive at that time, I have a clear memory of watching the space shuttle *Challenger* disintegrate seventy-three seconds into flight … Can I ask you, by a show of hands, to indicate if you watched the *Challenger* disaster live? Right. The majority of Americans who are over thirty years old today remember the shuttle crumble live on TV. It's consistently noted as the dawning of our era of live disaster and simulcast wars: O.J. Simpson fleeing in the white Bronco, the towers collapsing, etc., although there had of course been other televised traumas before. I don't have a single friend who doesn't remember watching it as it happened – not as a replay later when you knew the shuttle was doomed, but when you expected the shuttle disappear successfully into space and instead saw it engulfed in a giant fireball.[5]

The child Ben here seems to experience, in philosopher Bernard Stiegler's terms, 'the veritable planetary dimension of selection and diffusion, at the speed of light, of the industrial construction of the present.'[6] Stiegler himself, coincidentally, refers to the *Challenger* shuttle disaster, in *Technics and Time, 2* (2008):

> the ideal, according to the press, would be the suppression of all delay in transmission. The explosion of the space shuttle "Challenger" during the *live* coverage of its 1986 launch became an event of major proportions in the Reagan administration, which had organised a super-production of [media] "placement" on the mission's success. The death of eight people in an extraordinarily dangerous undertaking of this kind would not be exceptional in itself. But these deaths, which were *covered live*, as they occurred, for the vast majority of the planet, were

> (potentially) a political catastrophe and a sensational tragedy. The event-ability of an event is thus inseparable from the media, which, at the very least "co-produced" it.[7]

For Stiegler, the significance of the coverage of this particular event is that it brings into greater relief a new experience of time, one which has been shaped by the advent of, firstly, televisual, video and eventually digital media technologies. This new experience of time is one whereby the future tense is becoming (and arguably has been becoming since the heyday of postmodernism) increasingly dominant both in culture and philosophical critiques of culture. When Stiegler claims that the media 'co-produced' the event shown to the public, he is referring to the programmability of media content: certain events, such as a space shuttle launch, are guaranteed media coverage, and this creates future expectation for the audience. As so many millions come to view the same event, they come to share these programmed expectations, which, once mediated, may become memories. In this sense, the threat of the 'standardisation' of consciousness seems to be on the horizon. Stiegler tends to err on the side of hyperbole in his Adornian prognostications for mass culture, fearing 'the politico-spiritual, if not also of [sic] the material and corporeal, apocalypse: in some respects, this would be a neutron bomb of the mind, whose explosion would mean uninhabited matter and corporeality – a world of automatons.'[8]

The problem with Stiegler's account of what he refers to as the malaise of contemporary mnemotechnologies (technologies that remember on our behalf) is that it neglects to reflect on how *narrative* always operates alongside memory. Memory is never simply re-collected, but recounted via its narrativisation, and this means that the past retains its capacity for future reinvention. Lerner's autobiographical memory fiction, I suggest, thinks through the ways in which the past is continually reshaped according to the demands of the story one is telling, and this always means the

possibility of re-telling. This kind of reshaping of the past happens for Ben when he realises that he could *not* have witnessed the *Challenger* disaster live, as he originally claimed. Contrary to his confidence of having seen the space-shuttle explode 'as it happened',

> almost nobody saw it live: 1986 was early in the history of cable news, and although CNN carried the launch live, not that many of us just happened to be watching CNN in the middle of a working day, a school day … I remember tears in Mrs. Greiner's eyes and the students' initial incomprehension, some awkward laughter. But neither of us did see it: Randolph Elementary School in Topeka wasn't part of that broadcast. So unless you were watching CNN, or were in one of the special classrooms, you didn't witness it in the present tense.[9]

This realisation forces him to admit: 'at the beginning of my *story* of origins is a false memory of a moving image. I didn't see it live.'[10] Ben's memory-cum-story has evidently combined several recollections of his own and his peers' reactions to this tragic event, and his narratively-compelled imagination then played its role in supporting this recollective effort with related images circulating in the media after the event and congregating around the light projected by anamnesis.

For a memorable metaphor of how this happens, we might turn to Victor Burgin's account of remembering a film, in that the way we (mis)remember a film is often comparable to the way we (mis)remember our own experience. Burgin uses a fittingly astronautical image to describe the process of recalling scenes from films we have partially forgotten:

> The narratives [of these films] have dropped away, like those rockets that disintegrate in the atmosphere once they have placed their small payloads in orbit. Detached from their original settings each scene is now the satellite of the other. Each echoes the other, increasingly merges with the other, and I experience a kind of fascinated incomprehension before the hybrid object they have become.[11]

When it comes to remembering our own experience, like the experience of remembering fragments of a film we do not entirely recall, these mnemonic 'hybrid objects' are produced by the combined efforts of recollection and imagination. Fragments of a film's narrative are often remembered alongside one's own experience, so that the public is seen to be ever converging on, and sometimes even merging with, the private, as Burgin argues:

> The more the film is distanced in memory, the more the binding effect of the narrative is loosened. The sequence breaks apart. The fragments go adrift and enter into new combinations, more or less transitory, in the eddies of memory: memories of other films, and memories of real events.[12]

This implies that our own past is often seen through a kind of superimposed screen of personal memory combined with various sequence-images from films and other visual media. Public and private are seen to co-habitate in individual memory, at times almost indiscernibly. Yet, as Burgin's osmotic metaphor implies but does not quite say, the way that the past is seen – in my own figure of the superimposed screen – is precisely through one's articulation of memory *as* one's own narrative. The fragments of public and private memory can only ever 'enter into new combinations' by means of their narrativisation. This is why Ben's memory of this mediated tragic event is actually a *narrative fiction* constructed after the event took place, and this obviously undermines Stiegler's prognosis of psychic-standardisation caused by global media coverage. That is to say, we all remember differently, because we (yet) retain the capacity to narrativise (hence, reinterpret) our past experience, and this is the foundational premise for Lerner's project of writing memory in a media-saturated age.

In drawing attention to memory and narrative's interdependence in this manner, this essay seeks to answer two related questions. Firstly, how might Lerner's second novel be said to reflect on the contemporary philosophical understanding of time, where

the present is increasingly experienced as though already a future memory? Secondly, how can Lerner's narrator make good on his promise to project himself into different futures, to render futurity within the closed temporal loop of narrative temporality? Reflection on these questions will draw on resources provided by narrative theory, specifically on Mark Currie's work on prolepsis and narrative time. My reading of Lerner's novel situates it in a broader genre commonly referred to as 'autofiction,' where the borders separating autobiography and fiction are porous and allow for the continual cross-pollination of the real and the fictional. However, I wish to focus less on the fictionality of this narrative and more on its form: within this autofictional account of both real and imagined memories, the past is brought back to life through the narrator's play with tense and his reflections on the act of self-narration itself. This essay thinks of narrative as a kind of possibility that brings about acts of remembrance: for Lerner's narrator, the past is remembered *so that* it might be re-told. In talking about narrative as possibility in this manner, I invoke Stiegler's notion of writing as technics, a prosthetic technology that makes invention possible, and examine Lerner's strategies for the re-invention of the narration of past experience.[13]

The guiding supposition for this discussion of the intersection of the novelistic and the philosophical is that contemporary temporality is characterised by a sense of depresentification, in that our digitally-mediated reality consigns the present moment to the future, often in the present's very eventfulness. In this regard, Currie argues that recent advances in recording technologies have only contributed to this sense of life being experienced in the narrative mode, before it is actually narrated by a historical subject: 'Video recording and photography, like the preterite tense, structure the present as the object of a future memory. The act of recoding installs in the present an anticipated future from which the present will be re-experienced as representation of the

past, or an infinite sequence of future presents from which moments can be recollected.'[14] As present experience is already recorded and thus stored for its future recollection, our focus, as both Currie and Stiegler contend, increasingly shifts to what experience will come to mean. Lerner's novel may be read as expressive of this shift in, as it were, the tense structure of our experience, whereby the present is increasingly made to wear the burden of its future memory. Indeed, we shall see that Lerner's narrator is concerned with imagining, in Currie's phrase, 'an infinite sequence of future presents from which moments can be recollected.'

Narrative form and future possibility

Stiegler's critique of memory in the contemporary age is framed by the notion of technics as a necessary adjunct to human being, and for Stiegler writing is humanity's richest technics.[15] Writing in a sense embodies the very idea of technics, as it is the primary technology used for the preservation of mnemonic traces. According to Stiegler, technics is the site/sight of possibility, of creation: 'technics is the *inscription*, within a living being, of a *possible.*'[16] This future-gazing definition of technics is derived from the Derridean conceptualization of the trace structure of the sign: every sign is that which is predicated upon the possibility of its future repetition; the trace only realises itself when it is repeated. The trace is that which 'exists' in a state of perpetual becoming, never fully coinciding with itself. The trace is shifty cannot be caught with the net of precise definition.[17] What this means is that writing, as a technics that is composed of traces, always already has the future as its *envisaged*. Writing, in the form of narrative, provides that textual 'site' where the retrospect of memory meets the prospect of temporal becoming. Memory narratives articulate retrospection to prospection for identity, so that the identity of a character *in medias res* is being pulled,

so to speak, both backwards into the past and forwards into the future.

Stiegler's own description of writing a sentence is already expressive of this temporal structure of narrative that articulates pastness to futurity:

> [The] moment of writing of any text: the writer inscribes the present at the moment it is present-ed in the specific form of an absolutely singular already-there. This precisely identified already-there [what has been written] provides the leisure, the latitude, to examine the initial writer's reasoning – for that writer. In terms of what takes place as the writer writes, it might be said that the writing to come, the next sentence, connects with past-present writing as a reading of the already-there – a reading, interpretation and inscription (as new sentence) of *différance* concealed within the writing that is already-there.[18]

Narrative, in this sense, is that form of writing as technics that gives temporal shape to a life. This is so because to write even a single sentence of the story of one's life is already to think futurity (of one's past self), for every sentence still to come is expressive of a possibility, but a possibility made possible by what has gone before it. Every new sentence is thus a reading of, and a creative response to, the '*différance* concealed within the writing that is already-there.' Nevertheless, while the act of writing a narrative keeps the future open in this way, the future as it is represented in a *completed* narrative is necessarily a closed one. In narrative, the future is already there, in the pages to come.

10:04 is a singular narrative that may be said to reflect on this impasse. Lerner's autobiographical narrator repeatedly 'projects' himself forwards into imagined possibilities - often fearful ones - but he also imagines, crucially, how he *will have looked back* upon these possibilities. That is to say, this anxious narrator thinks of the future not in the future simple tense (at least not until the novel's ending), but in the mode of the future perfect, also called the future anterior. The future anterior is a tense most comfortable within the parameters of narrative time, for it contains within itself an

articulation of retrospect to prospect, and prospect to retrospect. Reflection on the future anterior is, as Currie reminds us, reflection on the very shape of narrative temporality: 'The future anterior gives us a grammatical form for the commingling of futurity and completion that [may be described] as a condition for narrative time.'[19]

Lerner's novel is able to formally reflect on the temporal shift caused by contemporary mnemotechnologies that Stiegler diagnoses, by making self-reflexive use of the conventions of the narrative representation of time. For Lerner's narrator, the temporal accent is always falling on his future, and thinking about the future always raises the question of one's identity. We find Ben explicitly reflecting on this question, when he claims: 'discovering you are not identical with yourself even in the most disturbing and painful way still contains the glimmer, however refracted, of a world to come.'[20] In Stiegler's thought, the essence of identity is that it is perennially self-imposed with this very question: 'Who am I (still to come)?'[21] Identity is the continual becoming of the self via its repetition of itself by means of symbolic/linguistic representations. The self is thus forever caught up in the shifting dialectic of repetition and difference.[22] The figure of becoming has its face to the future, so that 'I never cease to interpret myself as the retentional medium of myself; I never cease to interpret myself – and to write/interpret what is still to come, what is still unfolding of what has already occurred.'[23] We can see that in Stiegler's account of phenomenological becoming, a certain 'writing' already seems to take place in every moment of presence, for every moment becomes the 'already-there,' as though written on one's memory of the moment, and one then interprets oneself accordingly: reading 'what is still unfolding of what has already occurred.' However, this figurative writing of presence onto consciousness can never provide the self with completeness. This is why Stiegler characterises the self's completeness only

> in the form of the exemplary promise of a coherence remaining absolutely still to come … This coherence, which can be nothing but a unity promised like a future seeking its necessity, is traversed and 'cracked' by the irreducible fact that the same gives way to the different and the diverse, and that my performance of myself lets me know myself as an other – that I am myself that/an other … only a fiction, a projection, a phantasm of me, a me adopting personae… [24]

Stiegler is here still describing phenomenological becoming, where coherence remains 'absolutely still to come'; and yet his gesture towards the idea of 'a future seeking its necessity' might be read as an anticipation of the kind of coherence provided by narrative form.

For the living subject, this kind of narrative coherence remains its constant prospect, remaining perpetually on the horizon of its becoming in time, as its future possibility. When a life story is already written, on the other hand, the identity of the narrator is made coherent (within the confines of this writing) by the narrative configuration of the time of becoming. One's life now becomes bounded by the block-view of time, where the future is pre-existent.[25] If one is reading a narrative for the first time, then one is held in suspense about its protagonist's future, and one does appear to witness a process of becoming unfolding in the story being narrated, while nonetheless knowing that everything that one is reading has already been shaped by a writer's hand. The question these reflections on narrative identity pose to our reading of Lerner's text is: what novel strategies (in the sense of novelty and in the sense of being immanent in novelistic form) does Lerner adopt to render the uncertain contingency looming on his narrator's horizon of phenomenological becoming, within the temporally foreclosed structure of narrative time?

Prolepsis and a play with tense

In order to answer this question we need to consider Lerner's use of prolepsis or, more accurately, his playful adaptation of this narrative device that has become pervasive in contemporary fiction about memory.[26] Literary study has learnt much about prolepsis courtesy of Marcel Proust's seminal *À la recherche du temps perdu* (1913-1927), and Gerard Genette's discussion of Proust's ingenious manipulation of story time in narrative discourse.[27] Prolepsis is the narration of a story's future events out of sequence. A well-worn use of prolepsis occurs in crime fiction, where the narrative often begins *after* the crime has already been committed, so that, having begun with this jump forwards in story time, the remainder of the narrative will go back to the beginning to unravel what lead up to the murder being committed. A detective fiction's narrator may even be already dead, going back in time post-mortem to tell us of what lead up to his or her demise, as happens in Billy Wilder's noir classic, *Sunset Boulevard* (1950). Lerner's narrative begins with an unusual kind of prolepsis: in the opening paragraphs, the narrator outlines what essentially proves to be the shape of the novel we are reading,

> A few months before, the agent had emailed me that she believed I could get a "strong six-figure" advance based on a story of mine that had appeared in the *New Yorker* [entitled 'The Golden Vanity', which is reproduced in this novel]; and all I had to do was promise to turn it into a novel. I managed to draft an earnest if indefinite proposal and soon there was a competitive auction among the major New York houses and we were eating cephalopods in what would become the opening scene. "How exactly will you expand the story?" she'd asked, far look in her eyes because she was calculating tip.
>
> "I'll project myself into several futures simultaneously," I should have said, "a minor tremor in my hand; I'll work my way from irony to sincerity in the sinking city, a would-be Whitman of the vulnerable grid."[28]

Note that he couches this proleptic outline in the past modal tense - what he 'should have said' to his agent - as though wishing he could rewrite the past (of course he can but chooses not to), in order for this past to tally up neater with his future, the story he is presently narrating. From the very beginning of this novel, we thus already observe the continual shaping force of narrative form over memory, as we similarly saw this re-shaping at work in Ben's account of the *Challenger* disaster.

Ben's promise to project himself into several futures is in a sense the promise of every novel: it is the promise offered by reading a narrative for the first time, when possibilities abound in our ignorance of the story's plot. What makes this promise more difficult for this narrator to realize, however, is the fact that he is an autodiegetic narrator, and consequently already knows the future of his own narrated self. Regardless, the story to come in this novel is all about the past Ben's repeated attempts to project himself into several future possibilities and fearful outcomes. And, in the novel's final pages, the modal proleptic opening appears to become fulfilled. Having recounted his and his friend Alex's long trek through the temporarily shut-down areas of Downtown Manhattan, following a second hurricane ('in the sinking city'), he suddenly switches tenses, from past to future simple, desiring to 'say something to the schoolchildren of America':

> everything … I hear tonight will sound like Whitman, the similitudes of the past, and those of the future, corresponding … tonight even parasitic insects will appear to me as a bad form of collectivity that can stand as a figure of its possibility, circulating blood from host to host. Like a joke cycle, like a prosody. Don't get carried away, Alex will say, when she offers me a penny – no – strong six figures for my thoughts.[29]

The concluding line of the novel then has this narrator, as he aims for the heights of poetic sincerity, finally become a 'would-be Whitman' for the twenty-first century, as

Lerner typographically renders the sentence as verse: 'I know it's hard to understand / I am with you, and I know how it is.'[30] Lerner's use of prolepsis in the opening to his narrative is therefore a kind of reverse act of homage to Proust, in that whereas Marcel concludes the last volume of his narrative with the promise to write it (the book he now feels ready to write, but which is all-too evidently the book the reader is about to complete reading), Lerner's narrator promises to write the book to come at the start, but this is a book he has already written, where the ending is already closing-in over the horizon of the beginning.[31]

Lerner is evidently a self-conscious writer and this self-consciousness has to do in large part with his awareness of the temporal imposition facing the writer of memory: simply enough, in narrative the future is not open. More than this: for writers and readers living in an atmosphere dense with stories, narrative time comes to inflect everyday life itself. The understanding of lived experience may take on a character more appropriate to a narrative representation of time. Mark Currie offers the clearest account in contemporary critical thinking on this phenomenon of life borrowing an understanding of time from narrative:

> It is more rational to think of narrative, the already-there-ness of its future, and its tangible block view of its own universe, as a model which exactly fails to represent the ontological conditions of human beings. In this failure, the model of time which is being offered by narrative does its work by crossing the boundary between actual and potential futures to produce a hermeneutic circle between narrative and time, which encourages us to *envisage futures on the model of teleological retrospect which narrative encodes*.[32]

The innovation in Lerner's novelistic rendering of memory, I suggest, has to do with his narrator's self-conscious awareness of how teleological retrospect increasingly orders our experience of time, as well as his effort to represent this strange sense of

retrospective futurity as it is experienced outside of fiction within his fiction. In yet another moment of announcing a thesis, Ben informs the reader in direct address:

> I decided to replace the book I'd proposed with the book you are reading now, a work that, like a poem, is neither fiction nor nonfiction, but a flickering between them; I resolved to dilate my story not into a novel about literary fraudulence, about fabricating the past, but into an actual present alive with multiple futures.[33]

The problem he faces here is that this is obviously an impossible goal, due to the closed borders that narrative imposes on time, and which means that one is always condemned to writing about what has already occurred. Nevertheless, his narrative does manage to gesture towards 'multiple futures,' to somehow pry open a crack in narrative's block of closed time.

The way that Ben manages to achieve this, I have suggested, is through his playful adaptation of prolepsis, and before examining this adaptation further, we first need to consider how the use of prolepsis in fiction may produce a kind of depresentification of lived events outside of fiction, meaning that the form of narrative predisposes the writer/reader to see present events in the 'light shed' on them by their future explanation. As Curries argues,

> prolepsis, which articulates any past moment to some known moment subsequent to it, in a constant repetition of a hermeneutic circle of presentification and depresentification … joins the backwards movement of explanation to the forwards movement of life in a way that seems to deprive us of unmediated presence of fictional events, installing in the present a position of future retrospect from which an explanation of the present might be possible.[34]

Prolepsis deprives the present time of fiction of its presentness, precisely because it predisposes the reading of fiction's present to a view of its future meaning, under the shadow of the future retrospection of the present moment. Lerner's narrator, in an

implicit reaction to this narrative logic, seeks to restore a sense of 'unmediated presence' to past events represented in his memory narrative; and he performs this restoration of presence by repeatedly depicting the experience of failed prolepsis as it happened in his life. Claiming that prolepsis could 'happen' in life is of course a contradiction in terms: in life, unlike in narrative, future events cannot be lived out of turn. Life, as the unpredictable itself, precludes the very possibility of prolepsis. Failed prolepsis, in my sense, is another term for frustrated expectation, but specifically in the sense of an *anticipated future event in terms of which* we often experience our presence, which shadows our presence with the possibility of its arrival, and yet which (almost always) fails to arrive.

Anxiety about imminent danger is a useful emotion in this context, in that it is one that carries some philosophical weight. The future shows us its true face in the prospect of imminent danger, as Derrida famously writes: 'The future can only be anticipated in the form of absolute danger. This is what produces the absolute break with constituted normality and can thus be announced, presented, only as a monstrosity.'[35] During moments of anticipated danger, not knowing how we are going to react to an un*fore*seen experience, during such breaks with 'constituted normality,' our experience of presence suddenly becomes vertiginously open, undecided. We are *then* reminded that life is not at all like a book, despite the fact that we may be prone to live (read) it as such, prosthetically pre-disposed as we are to think of time in the future anterior mode, through the technology of writing. In confronting danger, our experience, at least temporarily, ceases to be depresentified. Daniel Katz, in his discussion of *10:04* in relation to Lerner's poetics, observes in this regard that 'The novel is concerned throughout with how a *horizon* of [the] future, itself unrealizable, is at the same time the single most determining factor dictating how we live every

"present" we are allowed to inhabit.'[36] For the narrator, this horizon is continually seen through the shimmer of a kind of Heideggerian *Angst*; to recite Blanchot, his future is an imminent avalanche threatening to crash over the present. For instance, when Ben and his young student Roberto are working on Roberto's prehistoric diorama, Ben experiences one of his regular attacks of vertiginous panic, this time giving it expression in Stieglerian fashion, when he describes a sudden sensation of agnosia (while holding a pair of safety scissors): 'a condition brought on by the intuition of spatial and temporal collapse or, paradoxically, an overwhelming sense of its sudden integration, as when a Ugandan warlord appears via YouTube in an undocumented Salvadorean child's Brooklyn-based dream of a future wrecked by dramatically changing weather patterns … Roberto, like me, tended to figure the global apocalyptically.'[37] We seem to run up against an obstacle, however, when we reflect that the fearful future Ben is gesturing towards here is only available to us as in the present, as phenomenological subjects, while he can only describe how his *past* self once figured the global present/future. Nonetheless, it is through re-invoking his past self's experiences of fear and uncertainty that he manages to conjure a sense of future openness, and we can now turn to a key moment in the text that embodies this process at work.

Below is a painting by Jules Bastien-Lepage, *Joan of Arc* (1879), a detail of which is reproduced in the novel (see Figure 1). Joan's outstretched hand is partially transparent: she is beginning to disappear from her present, a sign of her future demise, her fate known to the group of angels observing her, on the painting's left.

Figure 1. Jules Bastien-Lepage. *Joan of Arc* 1879, oil on canvas, 254 x 279.4 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Ben reads this painting as a depiction of the consequences of a kind of time travel: for Joan of Arc, her future already threatens to eat away her present, or, as he says, 'she's being pulled into the future.'[38] This painting may be read as a visual demonstration of narrative temporality in action: in the sense that, like the omniscient angels in the painting who know the future of this historical character, a narrator similarly knows the future of her character (or of her own past self as character). In this sense, the narrator Ben similarly views the narrated Ben as flickering between two orders of temporality, alternatingly almost merging with his narrated self (and thus 'not knowing' his own

future), and then departing from him and creating authorial distance (and already knowing the future from which he is narrating).[39]

The narrator's narrative strategy to render present his past self's sense of an open future, then, is to reproduce his experience of failed expectation, of fears which never materialised as existential facts, but were real enough to accent his past experience with the shadow of their threat. Lerner's narrative is thereby not just a record of past events, as we have come to expect from autofiction,[40] but equally a record of failed foresight: of how anxieties about spectral future events left their traces on his narrated self's consciousness. It is as though, in chronicling instances of failed expectation, false prognoses, Ben is aiming to get us to forget that we are in fact reading a narrative, for the simple reason that such worries about future threats which evaporate when they fail to arrive is an all too common feature of quotidian existence. For instance, early in the novel, after learning of the prognosis of an imminent hurricane, Ben and Alex are anxiously stocking up on supplies in the local supermarket, for the anticipated citywide shutdown. Ben then describes how such a moment of anticipated danger seems to open up the future. In case the reader should miss the philosophical significance of this idea, Lerner employs italics in the key sentence:

> *Everything will be as it is now, just a little different* – nothing in me or the store had changed, except maybe my aorta, but, as the eye [of the hurricane] drew near, what normally felt like the only possible world became one among many, its meaning everywhere up for grabs, however briefly – in the passing commons of a train, in a container of tasteless coffee.[41]

Ben here perceives everyday reality afresh; banal objects, even a 'container of tasteless coffee,' become suddenly noticeable, tangible to perception. He then spends the night at Alex's apartment, only to wake up in the early hours of the morning of the storm to find that it had passed with minor damage to their neighbourhood.

During the previous evening, a present that had been coloured-in, indeed made *present*, by the prospect of imminent danger, Ben had felt more intimate with his friend, even uncharacteristically stroking her hair while she slept. When 'constituted normality' is restored, however, the past seems to have lost the significance it then had. Ben considers kissing the sleeping Alex on the forehead, but quickly rejects this impulse:

> whatever intimacy had opened up between us had dissolved with the storm; even that relatively avuncular gesture would be strange for both of us now. More than that: it was as though this physical intimacy with Alex, just like the sociability with strangers or the aura around objects wasn't just over, but retrospectively erased. Because those moments had been enabled by a future that had never arrived, they could not be remembered from this future that, at and as the present, had obtained; they'd faded from the photograph.[42]

There is a pregnant contradiction in the above passage that needs to be read closely. Stating that these past moments (of tangible presence made possible by anticipated danger) have been 'retrospectively erased' and 'could not be remembered' is nonsensical, in narrative terms, for we had just read their description a few paragraphs earlier in the text, which the narrator described as though he again experienced that sense of foreshadowing. The narrator's claim perhaps contains some phenomenological truth, in the sense that we do tend to forget how past fears once accented our experience; these past fears, no longer real, are easily erased from present recollection. More importantly, though, the obvious contradiction of stating that this fleeting exposure to pure contingency and openness can no longer 'be remembered from this future that, at and as present, had obtained,' is intended to delineate, once again, two orders of temporality: narrative temporality versus phenomenological becoming, represented here as the time of the narrated and the time of narrating. From the perspective of the narrator looking back on himself and becoming 'one' with his past

self as a character in his own story, he perceives that 'fading' of himself caused by his past self's fear of imminent danger. Figuratively speaking, were Ben as *narrated* character to see himself as Joan depicted in Bastien-Lepage's painting, his outstretched hand would be transparent. However, since the feared catastrophe failed to arrive, for the *narrating* Ben this past experience of fear can no longer be fully re-experienced exactly as his past self experienced it when he had lived through his fearful anticipation of the hurricane. Thus, for the narrating Ben the outstretched hand would be intact.

But now we pause and reflect: if Ben the narrator is right in his claim that these past moments can no longer be recollected with the passing of the hurricane's threat, then how is it that, as the narrating-I who is no longer living under the cloud of his narrated-I's fears, he nonetheless *does* manage to describe exactly that experience? In first-person narration, as Currie's observes,

> the narrator is [always] located after the end of the represented sequence: if the narrator flashes into view, so does the future; if not, the trace of that narrator can nevertheless be found in the very retrospect of every narrative sentence, as a mark of the future in the present.[43]

What this means is that the future/narrating Ben was already present, in the very act of narration, when he was describing the past/narrated Ben's experiences in the supermarket and at Alex's apartment. Thus, what Ben's claim is affirming, in its very paradoxicality, is that narrative is able to contain those experiences of possibility, of imminence threatening to rupture the present, of one's past self. Ben's paradoxical claim may therefore be read as a reaffirmation of the often uncanny magic of self-narration: that, despite knowing this to be impossible, we do read and write our past selves as though we again relived 'their' concerns, which are no longer 'ours.'

Narrative, we have seen, allows the narrating-I to configure the mimesis of becoming one with the narrated-I's past experience, because it instructs the narrating-I

to think of time as an object of a future memory, and of course being able to imagine how the narrated self would have thought of time in these same terms. In another moment of anticipation of future danger, Ben is anxious about his heart (having earlier in the novel been diagnosed with a rare heart disorder), during a check-up in a cardiologist's rooms: 'So clearly could I picture the cardiologist walking in to inform me that the speed of dilation required immediate intervention that it was as though it had already happened, *predicting it felt like recalling* a traumatic event.'[44] We find ourselves here in the realm of the 'as though': of figuring life as narrative, living as though one were part of a pre-written narrative, where prediction is already the same thing as recollection. Instead of discounting the fears of his past self, from the perspective of a wiser present self, the narrator may be read here as demonstrating how an understanding of time derived from fiction, and from narrative more generally, often bears in a quite tangible way on present experience of time. If one is a writer, then one's present fears and anticipations are especially apt to become events anticipated in the mode of retrospect, so that one is, as it were, projecting oneself even further into the future than the event anticipated, and thereby already imagining oneself looking back on that event, as though already remembering it. Ben himself neatly spells out this logic, when, reflecting on his conversation with his friend Noor about often experiencing a sense of self-estrangement, like his earlier sensation of agnosia, he muses: 'discovering you are not identical with yourself even in the most disturbing and painful way still contains the glimmer, however refracted, of a world to come, where everything is the same but a little different because the past will be citable in all of its moments, including those that from our present present happened but never occurred.'[45]

This sentence is saying something profound about the novel's capacity to represent possibility, to gesture towards it, despite the temporally foreclosed nature of

narrative time. In order to zero in on its significance, I turn to Gary Saul Morson's term 'sideshadowing,' taken from his invigorating study of narrative temporality, *Narrative and Freedom: The Shadows of Time* (1994). Morson acknowledges that narrative time is ultimately deterministic and closed, as it seems to offer us only two possible explanations of its structure: 'backshadowing', where past events are interpreted as ineluctably leading up to the present, and 'foreshadowing', where 'a shadow is cast in advance of its object',[46] suggesting that the future object already exists and can be known in advance. 'Sideshadowing' is then Morson's term for a narrative stratagem that several writers have employed in various ways (his focus is chiefly on Tolstoy and Dostoevsky), in order to sidestep narrative's in-built sense of fatalism, and it requires that '[along] with an event, we see its alternatives; with each present, another possible present … In this way, the hypothetical shows through the actual and so achieves its own shadowy kind of existence in the text.'[47] Morson argues that the novel has a unique ability to deepen our understanding of time's openness, in its potential for thus sideshadowing what happened with what could have happened: 'By restoring the presentness of the past and cultivating a sense that something else might have happened, sideshadowing restores some of the presentness that has been lost. It alters the way we think about earlier events and the narrative models used to describe them.'[48] To return to Ben's statement: his narrative imagination enables him to restore the 'presentness' of his past by citing those moments when the future seemed perilously open, undecidable, moments that for his-then-present-self 'happened but never occurred'. By thus 'sideshadowing' its narrator's present, Lerner's novel allows us to see ghostly events that might have happened palimpsestically superimposed over what 'occurred'. In other words, it is as though we get a glimpse, by vicariously living through these moments of so-called failed prolepses, of the spectral presence of future events that *could* have

happened; we thus see both what did happen and catch a glimpse of another future 'timeline', as we come to inhabit a present shadowed over by these hypothetical eventualities. Ben's sideshadowing of his past self's present with the futural pull of anticipated events thus demonstrates how the future comes to exercise its 'presence', or how it somehow presences itself not only in moments of present expectation, but also in moments of retrospective narration.

This narrative strategy is thus the narrator's way of articulating our contemporary sense of time, a sense fostered by digital mnemotechnologies and the pervasive soup of stories wherein much of our consciousness is daily immersed. Ben's difficulty is that he is at pains to say that life is *not* like a book, but he still has to make this proclamation within the confines of a book's covers. Ordinary life is seldom ruptured by catastrophe, but it is often rippled by waves of worry issuing into consciousness from fearfully imagined futures. By recording instances of failed predictions, which for his past self already appeared to him in their guise as future memories, Ben is seeking after greater verisimilitude in narrating the contemporary experience of time. He seeks to express, more precisely, how real life is often already lived as though it were a work of fiction; as Currie suggests:

> When we read a novel we make present events that are in the past, and when we live life we often do the opposite: we live the present as if it were already in the past, as if it were the object of a future memory.[49]

This means that when we live life it is as though we were living a story in the process of being written, a story not yet complete but whose completion we were anticipating, in imagining ourselves already looking back on our present. If fiction is, as Currie suggests, about making present events that are past, then Ben's recounting of failed expectations, which his narrated-I already conceived as his future memories, may be

seen as rendering in the world of his story precisely that experience of living the present moment as a future memory, that sense of depresentification increasingly familiar outside the borders of fiction. Lerner, in short, may be read as providing a fictional self-reflexive model of what Currie calls 'the fashion for prolepsis' in contemporary culture, and modern narrative in general, which encourages one to think of the actual present as already a future memory, and which thus 'produces in the world a generalised future orientation such that the understanding of the present becomes increasingly focused on the question of what it will come to mean.'[50]

As memory is today increasingly relegated to digital recording technologies, and as the so-called industrial media complex co-produces the social reality it purports merely to report, what hope is there for an individual consciousness but to turn into an automaton, living a life prescripted by these globally mediated narratives? This is Stiegler's distressed question, but it is one which might be reformulated in slightly less radical terms, if we turn to Mark Hansen's comment on Stiegler's prognosis of our 'cultural malaise.'[51] 'Stiegler,' Hansen writes, 'suggests that today's culture industries exert a stranglehold on our subjectivity through their hyperstandardisation; by synchronising the time of consciousness at the global level, they position commodified memories as the basis for the collective *invention* of the future.'[52] Taking into account Hansen's invocation of the idea of invention, the question may now be rephrased as: do these commodified global memories predetermine the kind of future we *could* invent? Stiegler's own answer to this question seems to vacillate between the affirmative and the negative. When he prognosticates the future as a dystopian world of 'automatonous' rather than autonomous individuals, society becoming a hive-like global 'One,' the answer appears to be affirmative.[53] Yet his own account of the essence of technics actually undermines this bleak prophecy: technics, we recall, is for Stiegler the very

source of the possible. Every tool – and for human beings writing is surely their greatest tool – is 'already a projection screen' that promises its user, in Stiegler's own words, 'the capacity to project a future.'[54]

'I'll project myself into several futures simultaneously': this is the daring promise offered us by Lerner's narrator, at the start of the novel. As a child he witnessed a mass-mediated memory, which was originally intended as a projection into the future, of the *Challenger* shuttle disaster. The global coverage of the space shuttle's launch was planned well in advance, as part of a larger globally mediated narrative of America's stellar position on the political stage, as a technological and financial superpower, in the wave of retrospectively misguided optimism that characterised American politics during the Ronald Reagan administration. Yet what was intended – pre-scripted – to be the recounting of a triumphal national event turned into a tragic accident. In a moment, the future as shock intervened and a prewritten narrative of national pride was instantly transformed into catastrophe. The significance of Ben selecting *this* particular moment as the foundation of his story of origins as a poet lies in part in this event's undermining of a pre-scripted media narrative. Ben's narrative as a whole is similarly a chronicle of his *own* failed prognostications of future outcomes, thus opening up a sense of the future for both himself and his readers. In this sense, his account is narrated against the grain of narrative temporality itself, where anticipation is always the same thing as retrospection: in writing about past possibilities that failed to arrive, the narrator is keeping a sense of future possibility open, despite the fact of narrative's closed temporal borders keeping it shut.

Narrative's promise

As we saw in the beginning of this discussion, the story comes to a close with Ben

describing his and his friend Alex's long walk south through Manhattan, back to Brooklyn, after the second hurricane has ruffled the city. We learn that Alex is now pregnant, and Ben is the 'surrogate' father. We also recall that the narrator here suddenly switches tenses: the novel's last two paragraphs are narrated in the future simple tense, rather than the expected preterite. In Brooklyn, they will board a bus, he writes, and 'I will stand and offer my seat to an elderly woman […] Then, even though it would sound improbable in fiction, [this] woman with the plants will turn to Alex and say: Are you expecting? She will explain there is a certain glow. She'll guess it is a girl.'[55] The reason this 'would sound improbable in fiction' is not only the unlikelihood of a stranger making this remark to a woman only in the first eight weeks of pregnancy, but also the fact that the narrative has itself switched to a future tense, which is a tense improbable in fiction, in light of fiction's inherent belatedness. In this projected future (at least from the perspective of the narrated-I), the writer will become one in spirit with his idealized Whitman: 'It and everything else I hear tonight will sound like Whitman, the similitudes of the past, and those of the future, corresponding.'[56]

In the final paragraph, Ben and Alex will stop for a meal at a sushi restaurant in Prospect Heights, and Ben appears to conclude his narrative with a promise for his own future self as writer of memory:

> Sitting at a small table looking through our reflection in the window onto Flatbush Avenue, I will begin to remember our walk in the third-person, as if I'd seen it from the Manhattan Bridge, but, at the time of writing, as I lean against the chain link fence intended to stop jumpers, I am looking back at the totaled city in the second person plural. I know it's hard to understand / I am with you, and I know how it is.[57]

This promise, by a sleight-of-hand trick in tense midway through the sentence, shifts us suddenly into the narrator's present, 'the time of writing,' and becomes a kind of

authorial disclosure. It seems that the future projections narrated earlier were, again, failed prolepses, but this time into more utopian possibilities. There is of course also the possibility that the switch to the future simple tense is simply a game with the reader: all the narrator is doing here is recounting his memory of events that have already occurred, but events which for his *past* self were still to come. Both readings remain open, as we shimmer through temporalities. Regardless, describing the narration of one's memory through these temporal shifts – from the accustomed preterite tense, to the jump into the future simple, and then the final switch into the present[58] - emphasizes the always retrospective promise of narrative as a vital technology for personal memory. Ben's statement, 'I will begin to remember our walk in the third-person,' is testimony to narrative's ability to think future memory, or to think of the future as a memory which one will have recounted back to oneself as a character in a story, to a future self that will also be changed by this act of narration. Narrative form is, to adopt again Stiegler's phrasing, the site for the 'the inscription, within a living being, of a possible.'[59]

The reinvention of contemporary experience, through the art of narration, is a creative act that always comes too late, only arriving after experience; which also means, however, that it is an act that belongs to the future. As long as one is able to narrate one's memories and to figure one's past as narrative, one is enabled to project oneself into the future as the object of one's own future memories, as the character authored by oneself and playing the part of oneself in the future story of one's life, and thus resist the threats to consciousness posed by global media homogenization and standardization of content. If narrative, as a prosthesis on which memory depends, contains within itself the capacity to figure the past according to the past's future recollection, then so long as one can narrate experience one can resist the 'automatonous' reification, the total loss of anamnesis anticipated by Stiegler. Narrating

anamnesis forestalls the possibility of its loss. From this perspective, Lerner's novel might be said to speak the following philosophical reasoning through its form: I, as the writer of my memory, continue to anticipate myself as the narrated-other in the story about myself, whom I will have created on the narrative prosthetic screen for my future, whereon my memory awaits to be re-told. Narrative conceived as prosthesis allows us to read the novel as providing the temporal grammar for rewriting, and thus always potentially refiguring, both our past and the possibilities for our individual and collective future. So long as narratives are still being read, in an age of a seeming foreclosure of future possibilities, literary singularities like *10:04* may yet be written, providing models for the articulation of memory to its possible futures. This is the promise of narrative form construed as technics, a prosthesis vital to the grasp of our own time.

Notes

[1] Ben Lerner, in Cressida Leyshon, 'Ben Lerner on Art, Language and Uber', *New Yorker*, 5.31 (2016). http://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/fiction-this-week-ben-lerner-201-06-06.

[2] Maurice Blanchot, 'Death Sentence', trans. Lydia Davis, in *Station Hill Blanchot Reader: Fiction & Literary Essays*, ed. George Quasha (Barrytown: Station Hill, 2000), p.162.

[3] Bernard Stiegler, *Time and Technics, 3*: *Cinematic Time and the Question of Malaise*, trans. Stephen Barker (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), p. 206.

[4] In identifying the narrator with the name, 'Ben', I here disagree with Ben de Bruyn's suggestion that this narrator is nameless in the novel. The reason for this is that one can deduce from paratextual elements that he is a fictionalized version of Ben Lerner, as one of Lerner's actual short stories, 'The Golden Vanity,' appears in the text as the work of this novel's narrator. See De Bruyn, 'Realism 4^0: Objects, Weather and Infrastructure in Ben Lerner's *10:04*,' *Textual Practice* (2016), p. 953.

[5] Ben Lerner, *10:04* (London: Granta, 2015), pp. 110-111.

[6] Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 2: Disorientation,* trans. Stephen Barker (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 112.

[7] Stiegler, ibid, pp. 112-113. Cf. Currie's suggestion that certain media-covered events come into being as the result of the possibility of their representation by the media. The tragically common instance of this today is the act of terrorism, which is predicated on the possibility of its being recounted on a global scale; hence, the possibility for its global mediation 'comes before' the act itself, and in this way opens the space for this act to take place, before it actually becomes perpetrated. See Currie, *About Time: Narrative, Fiction and the Philosophy of Time* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 42.

[8] Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 3*, p. 75.

[9] Lerner, *10:04*, p. 111.

[10] My emphasis, ibid., p. 115.

[11] Victor Burgin, *The Remembered Film* (London: Reaktion Books, 2010), p. 59.

[12] Ibid., p. 68.

[13] 'A "prosthesis" does not supplement something, does not replace what would have been there before it and would have been lost: it is added. By pros-thesis, we understand (1) set in front of, or spatialisation … (2) set in advance, already there (past) and anticipation (foresight), that is, temporalisation,' in Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus*, trans. Richard Beardsworth and George Collins (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 152.

[14] Currie, *About Time,* p. 41.

[15] For a useful explication of how Stiegler conceives of human evolution in terms of technical innovation (for Stiegler the two always evolve alongside each other), see John Lechte, 'Technics, Time and Stiegler's "Orthographic Moment"', in *Parallax* 13:4 (2007), pp. 64-77.

[16] Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 3*, p. 203.

[17] Among Derrida's several definitions of 'trace', the following one is perhaps most germane to my argument: 'The trace is not a presence but is rather the simulacrum of a presence that dislocates, displaces, and refers beyond itself. The trace has, properly speaking, no place, for effacement belongs to the very structure of the trace,' in Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, trans. David B. Allison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), p. 156.

[18] Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 2*, p. 39.

[19] Currie, 'The Trace of the Future', in Sebastian Groes (ed), *Memory in the Twenty-First Century: New Critical Perspectives from the Arts, Humanities and Sciences* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), p. 203.

[20] Lerner, *10:04*, p. 109.

[21] Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 3*, p. 32.

[22] For an account of how narrative acts as the fulcrum for the articulation of sameness to difference for personal identity, see Paul Ricoeur, 'Personal Identity and Narrative,' in *Oneself As Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. 113-140.

[23] Stiegler, *Technics and Time 3*, p. 61.

[24] My emphasis, Ibid.

[25] On a lucid distinction between cosmological and phenomenological time, see Currie, 'Inner and Outer Time,' in *About Time,* pp. 73-87.

[26] Regarding this trend, Curries observes: 'The modern novel … favours the device of prolepsis, or flash forward, in which the focus of a narration takes an excursion forwards into the future of a story to narrate it out of turn.' See Currie, 'The Trace of the Future', p. 201.

[27] See particularly Gerard Genette, 'Order', in *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (New Yorker: Cornell University Press, 1983), pp. 33-68.

[28] Lerner, *10:04*, p. 4.

[29] Ibid., pp. 239-240.

[30] Ibid. For a discussion of how Lerner's poetry interpenetrates his prose, see Katz, '"I did not walk here all the way from prose": Ben Lerner's virtual poetics', *Textual Practice*, (2016).

[31] See Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time, VI: Time Regained*, trans. C.K. Moncrieff, Andreas Mayor and Terence Kilmartin, revised by D.J. Enright (London: Vintage, 1996), pp. 445-451.

[32] My emphasis, Currie, *About Time*, p. 21.

[33] Lerner, *10:04*, p. 194.

[34] Currie, *About Time*, p. 99.

[35] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016), p. 4.

[36] Katz, 'Ben Lerner's virtual poetics,' p. 11.

[37] Lerner, *10:04*, p.14.

[38] Ibid., p. 9.

[39] The other image included in the novel is a film still from *Back to the Future* (1985), showing the protagonist Marty's (Michael J. Fox) hand becoming partially transparent; the difference between the film still and the painting, however, is that the painting concerns itself with futurity (what will imminently happen to Joan of Arc), whereas the film image is about the past reshaping the present (Marty intervening in his past and preventing his parents from meeting, thereby cancelling out his own future existence). Although both

images illustrate this novel's thinking about narrative time, I will limit my discussion to the painting, as it foregrounds anticipation.

[40] Karl Ove Knausgaard's six volume *My Struggle*, for instance, is a chronicle of past events *tout compris*. For Lerner's reading of Knausgaard's exhaustive realism, see Ben Lerner, 'Each Cornflake', *London Review of Books*, 34.10 (2014). https://www.lrb.co.uk/v36/n10/ben-lerner/each-cornflake.

[41] Lerner, *10:04*, p. 19.

[42] Ibid., p. 24.

[43] Currie, 'The Trace of the Future', p. 201.

[44] My emphasis, Lerner, *10:04*, p. 206.

[45] Ibid., p. 109.

[46] Morson, *Narrative and Freedom: The Shadows of Time* (London: Yale University Press, 1994), p. 48.

[47] Ibid., p. 118.

[48] Ibid., p. 6-7.

[49] Currie, *About Time*, p. 30.

[50] Ibid., p. 22.

[51] For Stiegler's interrogation of art as remedy to mass culture's stagnation, see *Symbolic Misery Volume 1: The Hyperindustrial Epoch*, trans. Barnaby Norman (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014); and *Symbolic Misery Volume 2: The katastrophe of the Sensible*, trans. Barnaby Norman (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015). Stiegler's areas of focus in these volumes are film (*Volume 1*), and music, art and sculpture (*Volume 2*). See also Martin Crowley, 'The Artist and the Amateur, from Misery to Invention', in *Stiegler and Technics*, pp. 119-137. Prose fiction remains, thus far, absent from Stiegler's aesthetic theorising.

[52] Hansen, *Critical Terms*, p. 110.

[53] See Stiegler, 'The Allegory of the Anthill,' in *Symbolic Misery Volume 1: The Hyperindustrial Epoch*, trans. Barnaby Norman (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014), pp. 45-80.

[54] Stiegler, *Techncis and Time, 3*, p. 206.

[55] Lerner, *10:04*, p. 239.

[56] Ibid.

[57] Ibid., 240.

[58] A fourth tense might be appended here: the more present present of poetry. The final sentence of this novel consists of two lines of verse (the second line is a quotation from Whitman), and it functions almost as a performative utterance, an utterance that effects a certain presence in its very enunciation. What it says is as important as what it does, and the

'doing' here applies to narrative time: it as though the narrator (or perhaps Ben Lerner) seeks to make narrative's present (which is still shadowed by the preterite) take on the purer, more immediate presence of poetry. We have thus truly joined the narrator in his present; or at least seem to witness this present brought about in reciting this line. For a subtle reading of Lerner's devotion to Whitman's poetry, see Daniel Katz, 'Ben Lerner's virtual poetics,' pp. 13-15.

[59] Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 3*, p. 203.

ORCID

Leonid Bilmes http://orcid.org/0000-0001-7003-7376